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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HAVANA 001011

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DEPT FOR WHA/CCA, DHS FOR TSA

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: TSA DELEGATION VISIT TO CUBA: 7-22 OCTOBER

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) SUMMARY: A delegation from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) visited Cuba from 7 to 22 October to assess the security of Cuban airports where U.S. (OFAC-licensed) charter flights operate: i.e., Havana, Cienfuegos, Camaguey, Santiago de Cuba, and Holguin. Interchanges with GOC officials were conducted at a professional level and politics were rarely addressed. TSA members expressed overall satisfaction with Cuban civil aviation security and its compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards. The TSA visit allowed USINT to gain valuable insights into Cuban government operations and life outside of Havana. The GOC has already requested, via diplomatic note dated 15 October, to host a bilateral meeting in Havana with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) officials and we believe that the meeting would be useful. USINT will comment septel on U.S. charter operations in Cuba and impressions of conditions outside Havana. End Summary.

TSA Delegation

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12. (U) A delegation from Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration (TSA) visited Cuba from 7 to 22 October. The three members of the delegation were Senior Aviation Security Specialist George Perez, who was also the delegation's Team Leader, Senior Transportation Security Specialist Julio Velez, and Stephen Perez, Area Manager for the Americas from the Global Strategies Division, TSA. The purpose of the visit was to assess the security of

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Cuban airports where U.S. (OFAC-licensed) charter flights operate. The standards used for the assessment are those set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), specifically Annex 17, which governs all security aspects.

13. (SBU) USINT's Econoff escorted the delegation throughout the visit. This was especially significant given that it included sites outside Havana. (Note: The previous TSA visit to Cuba took place in 2003, before movement on the island became restricted to Havana for USINT personnel. With

the exceptions of periodic consular officer visits to American prisoners outside of Havana and occasional repatriations carried out by the U.S. Coast Guard at designated locations not far from Havana, USINT personnel have not been allowed outside Havana since 2003. End Note.).

#### Cuban Delegation

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¶4. (SBU) At the national level, Cuban civil aviation consists of the "Instituto de Aeronautica Civil de Cuba" (IACC; Cuban Civil Aviation Institute). The Institute's President is retired Brigadier General Rogelio Acevedo Gonzalez and the Vice President (VP) is Argimiro Ojeda Vives.

The TSA delegation was given an in-brief at IACC headquarters in Havana by VP Ojeda (engineer; educated in St. Petersburg, Russia), who gave a welcome, explained IACC's mission and organizational structure, then discussed the delegation's visit and itinerary. The itinerary, roughly one week in Havana and another in the rest of the country, was formulated to coincide with U.S. charter flights into the various airports where they operate (in the actual order visited): Havana, Cienfuegos, Camaguey, Santiago de Cuba, and Holguin.

¶5. (C) Also present at the in-brief were four Cuban "action officers" for the visit, with whom the team became fairly well acquainted as they accompanied the TSA delegation on every visit throughout the 16 days:

-- Julian Rodriguez, Department of Security and Protection, IACC: Head of all civil aviation security in Cuba (U.S. equivalent would be the DGCA, Director General of Civil Aviation). Rodriguez has had experience as an ICAO inspector. He actually drafted Cuba's "National Regulations for the Security and Protection of Civil Aviation, 4th edition, 2005." Also called RNA-17, the document is

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classified for national security reasons.

-- Armando Garbalosa Cruz, Head of the Airport Security Group within "Empresa Cubana de Aeropuertos y Servicios Aeronauticos S.A." (ECASA; Cuban Airport and Air Services Company): ECASA is a state company that provides a number of services to airlines and airports. Garbalosa is the national head of the airport security services arm of the company. Garbalosa has also had experience as an ICAO inspector. He is also a retired Ministry of Interior (MinInt) officer.

-- Captain Juan Carlos Torres Garcia, Division of Security and Protection, Ministry of Interior (MinInt): His role and that of MinInt were never fully addressed by the Cubans beyond explaining the logic for MinInt's involvement. With regard to civil aviation, MinInt is the Cuban equivalent of DHS, which serves as TSA's higher headquarters in the U.S. It therefore follows that MinInt, as the policy-making body for Cuban domestic security matters, would have a similar role as DHS with respect to aviation security.

-- Enrique Prieto Lopez, North America Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MinRex). Prieto arrived this August from The Hague, The Netherlands, where he served as DCM during the past four years. Previous assignments include Tehran, Iran, and the Cuban Interests Section, Washington, DC.

#### Cuban Civil Aviation

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¶6. (SBU) Over 500 aircraft pass through Cuban airspace every day. According to VP Ojeda, IACC is one of the GOC's "central administration organizations," which means that it is its own "ministry" and therefore operates independently, falling under the control of the Ministries of Interior and

Defense only in the event of a national security emergency. The Institute carries out all civil aviation policy formulation and implementation, ensuring that its national program is in compliance with ICAO standards. The IACC includes 11 GOC companies, 18,000 employees and oversees the operations of Cuba's 11 international airports and 13 national airports.

#### Airport Visits

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¶7. (C) While both Cuba and the U.S. are members of ICAO, there are no bilateral agreements that would obligate either to submit to an inspection by the other. For this reason, and aware of the difficult relationship between the two countries, the TSA delegation opted to use the word "visit" as opposed to "inspection." The tone during the visits was that of professionals having a constructive exchange, in which politics were rarely addressed. (Comment: Unlike our previous -- albeit rare -- encounters with GOC officials, there were no initial anti-embargo volleys or propaganda attacks. Instead, with the TSA delegation, the Cubans were all business -- civil aviation -- from the start. End Comment.)

¶8. (SBU) The Cuban delegation made sure the TSA delegation was given full access to the facilities and personnel at each airport. Each visit included: Initial introductions and briefings by various civil aviation and security officials at each airport; a tour of facilities (driven through runway, airport security perimeter, guard checkpoints, access points); observation of check-in procedures; a description of terminal layout; observation of immigration, customs and security checks and screening procedures; a tour of baggage handling facilities, observation of procedures and screening equipment (X-ray machines used varied between foreign makers: Chinese NucTech, German Heimann, and Canadian Carrington); and demonstrations of sniffing dogs for drugs and explosives, etc.

#### Cuban Security and U.S. Immigration Policy

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¶9. (SBU) TSA personnel interviewed pilots and crews of U.S. flights. These were unanimous in their opinion that airport security in Cuba is better than in other destinations they fly to. In an authoritarian state like Cuba, it is perhaps not surprising that security, especially against illegal emigration, is a strength. Cuban delegation officials willingly admitted that Cuban airport security policy had a heavy emphasis on denying illegal exits. They explained that, while not wanting to make any judgments about U.S. immigration policy with regard to Cuba, the policy has the effect of providing a strong incentive to leave Cuba. In their view, some Cubans inevitably will try to leave by whatever means possible, almost all of which are illegal in Cuba. From the standpoint of security, Cuban officials argued that they must be prepared for worst-case scenarios such as aircraft hijackings. This philosophy helps explain why Cuban immigration officials are part of MinInt and wear military rank. Every terminal was usually headed by a MinInt Lieutenant Colonel.

#### National Security Committee

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¶11. (SBU) According to VP Ojeda, civil aviation convenes a National Security Committee every four months, which is normally chaired by the President or Vice President of IACC and includes representatives from MinInt, Immigration, Customs, "Empresa de Seguridad Nacional" (ESN; National Security Company), MINFAR (Ministry of Defense), MinRex, and a few others. The only time when the committee is

chaired by the military is in the case of a national security emergency. Individual airports also convene their own Security Committee every few months and must periodically hold table-top and contingency-training exercises, which include scenarios such as hijackings, bomb-threats, or aircraft accidents.

#### Heavy Surveillance

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¶12. (C) Although no one in the TSA delegation experienced any harassment, it was noticeable to all members of the delegation that we were being surveilled throughout the trip. While traveling 3,500 km in the interior of Cuba, we would encounter policemen awkwardly placed in the middle of nowhere, picking up their radios as we drove by as if it were a checkpoint and our location was being reported. On one occasion, a policeman actually saluted our vehicle. When we would arrive at hotels, the check-in personnel seemed to be anxiously waiting for us and knew exactly where we were from. Coincidentally, after leaving their Havana hotel for a week, TSA members were placed in exactly the same rooms upon their return to Havana from the interior.

#### Outbrief and Final Report

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¶13. (C) The TSA delegation briefed VP Ojeda and the Cuban delegation at IACC headquarters on 22 October. TSA members expressed their overall opinion that Cuban civil aviation security was satisfactory and complied with ICAO Annex 17. They highlighted specific areas where they believe Cuban airport security is strong, including: Immigration officials control access into and out of the aircraft (unique to Cuba); there is a strong presence of various security personnel (more than in other countries); there is a good access control and screening system (minimal number of access points and identification badge system that is standardized nationally); and, security is characterized by simplicity in operations (organizations, standards and procedures are the same at all airports). In addition, Cuba has been audited by ICAO in the past, with good results.

¶14. (C) TSA members admitted that if this had been a real inspection, they would have needed several days per airport, simply because the process is very detailed and the checklists are long. However, they were confident that if given sufficient access, from experience, they would be able to make a good assessment by seeing what they need to see and asking the right questions. As the trip progressed,

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the TSA delegation's collegial approach allowed some trust to develop. An illustrative example was how on the very first meeting Julian Rodriguez, head of all civil aviation security, told TSA team leader George Perez that he wanted all questions to be directed at him; yet, in actuality, TSA encountered no restrictions in asking questions directly to any Cuban. According to TSA members, they saw and asked freely what they needed.

¶15. (C) Similarly, while TSA delegates were only given a copy of the cover and index of RNA-17 (because it is classified), just by asking questions and from their own observations they felt they were able to get about 85% of the answers they were looking for, vastly exceeding their own expectations about this visit. TSA members confirmed to Econoff that from a security standpoint, Cuba has a very good system -- again, not surprising in a totalitarian state -- and that they were not trying to sugar-coat the results. They said the final report will be released, through the State Department and USINT, to IACC in approximately six months. In closing, TSA members expressed gratitude for the hospitality they received throughout the visit and for the freedom of access they experienced at the airports.

## FAA Visit in the Horizon

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¶16. (U) Diplomatic Note 2661 from MinRex, dated 15 October, reiterates GOC willingness to host a bilateral meeting in Havana with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) officials. This meeting used to be held on an annual basis but did not take place last year; the last one was held in Miami on September 2005. VP Ojeda had expressed his wish for these visits to restart at the 8 October in-brief with TSA. Predictably, we received the DipNote a week later. At the out-brief, Econoff informed VP Ojeda and the rest of the Cuban delegation that Washington had received it. Ojeda expressed optimism that it would be favorably received.

Comments:

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¶17. (C) The GOC probably had a combination of reasons to allow this visit: 1) GOC does not want to risk U.S. charter flights being curtailed for not allowing the TSA visit; 2) GOC wants to promote the increase of U.S. flights into Cuba for economic reasons (tourism has been in decline and has been slow to recover), as well as political (as a matter of policy, the GOC wants a reduction of U.S. travel restrictions); 3) GOC wants a reciprocal visit to the few destinations in the U.S. where Cubana airline and U.S. charters are allowed fly. Allowing this visit is a convenient tactic for the GOC in that Cuban civil aviation professionals will naturally voice their opinions about the economic benefits and expansion of airport operations that would result from increased air traffic from the U.S. These Cuban aviation professionals, however, logically felt they were neither qualified nor authorized to comment or respond about the political obstacles -- especially improvement in the human rights situation -- which would be necessary before that traffic could increase.

¶18. (C) We view the TSA delegation visit as a success in several ways. Civil aviation security is an important area where such a visit was duly warranted. Aviation safety is just as important and we see no reason why the annual bilateral meeting should be postponed any further, especially on an issue that affects USINT personnel and their families. Almost equally important, we gained valuable insights about Cuba that will instruct our understanding of developments on the island better.

PARMLY